"And me?"
"Yes, my lord."
"Why?"
"Because I couldn't free you. They were my people, and free men. By now, they're far out of reach. Safe...in the mountains."
Spock broke the silence with another command. "More water." Wordlessly, Kirk filled the cup and brought it.
"You could have gone with them. You risked death to go free once before, this time there was no risk. Why didn't you go?"
"You were wounded, even if I could have pursuaded them to let you go, or tricked them somehow, into thinking you had escaped--you would have been alone and helpless in the desert. You've been feverish--delirious. I was a man before Vulcan made me a slave, Spock. You saved me from torture. Now I have done the same for you!"
"Jim--"
Kirk turned away, hiding tears of weariness, long effort, and hopelessness. "Please, let me alone!"
"But you have been--"
"A loyal, docile, obedient pet!" Kirk swung around. "You talked in your sleep, Spock. About how to train hunting cats, and slaves. I gave up my freedom for a discourse on behavior modification When is a man not a man? When he's a slave. Which I am, by my own choice!"
"If you regret..."
"Regret?" Kirk laughed harshly. "Of course I regret! I could be free this minute, and I know you'll never give me another chance after this, and I am a fool--" He swayed as he spoke, and the Vulcan looked up sharply.
"How long have we been traveling?"
"Since we left, all night and through the day. I was afraid they'd come after us."
"You have had too much sun. Jim, come here."
Kirk half fell to his knees beside Spock, dizzy, sick, wanting to go, hating himself for wanting to, unable to stop the tears. "What could I do?" he asked helplessly. "They were going to kill you."
Spock gathered the trembling figure close, cradled the golden head against his shoulder. "I know he soothed, "I know. It's over, now. Sleep."

The following morning Spock had regained his strength, and it was Kirk who was listless and weak so that Spock considered resting for the day. He decided to press on, however, because they were a mere half-day's ride from his home, and if the Human's condition worsened, he wanted a healer within reach. As a precaution he took the slave up before him as he rode, concealing him in the folds of his light desert cloak. Kirk slept most of the time, relaxing confidently in the curve of his master's arm, and Spock found himself fighting a curious, possessive tenderness as he gazed down at the quiet face.
He was, quite frankly, puzzled. The Human could have been free, but had chosen to remain in slavery, not because he wished it, or because he had been trained to the point of mindless obedience, but to guard the man who owned him, and whose ownership he resented. Ownership--not Spock himself. The unguarded responsiveness was real. The resentment was real. If Kirk had been free, what a warrior he would have made. Safely out of Savak's sadistic hands, Kirk had shown a strength of character than any man must respect, and for the first time Spock began to understand how it was possible to become...fond of a slave. He looked down at the warm body in his arms. This was no mere bed slave, the responsive body had its own resiliance and strength. The wine-gold eyes that could glow so softly with passion could also turn steely with determination, and the warm, seductive mouth harden in resolution.
Almost without realizing it, Spock had forgotten all his plans to take a mate of his own race. Kirk was the one he wanted, and his arms tightened in determination to keep him. Think--he must think, plan, find a way... The increased pressure woke Kirk, and his sensitive lips curved in a mocking smile.
"I thought we were sleeping," he said..
"We are almost there. You can see the house now."
Refreshed by his rest, Kirk was sitting up alertly as they rode into the courtyard, but Spock had refused to let him resume his own mount. He remained silent as the household slaves ran out to welcome Spock home, feeling a little overwhelmed by the sheer size of the sprawling edifice before him. He followed closely at his master's heels as Spock hurried inside, to be greeted by a handsome older Vulcan who smiled with pleasure at his arrival..
"You are most welcome, my son." The man gestured at the slave's activity. "As you see, you are a little before the time we expected you."
"I might have been long after it, but for my slave."
Kirk knelt respectfully as the older Vulcan turned toward him. Spock recounted his capture by the renegades, and his father's face darkened.
"I will order a pursuit."
Spock felt the tension in the kneeling figure beside him. "Useless, I fear, Sarek. They will have reached their hidden stronghold by now." Without looking he felt the subtle relaxation.
"A continuing hazard. We will mount a campaign against them one day and end it. But you were fortunate that your slave remained loyal. Human is he not? It is long since one of his race served in this house.. He is beautiful...in an alien fashion, of course."
"Beautiful, intelligent, and courageous. He is being trained to serve me in battle, and has made excellent progress."
"Curious. I have never heard of a pleasure slave being fit to bear arms. Still, I agree, it would be a pity to waste such spirit. Now, would you care to rest for a time after your journey? I